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FM REO HILLAH
TO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0628
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0642
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEHIHL/REO HILLAH 0693

C O N F I D E N T I A L HILLAH 000095

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/1/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: DURING FRIDAY PRAYERS IN KUFA, MUQTADA AL-SADR APPEARS TO
MODERATE STAND ON WITHDRAWAL OF COALITION FORCES

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State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[11](#). (U) This is a SET Najaf cable.

[12](#). (C) Summary: On Friday, May 26, Muqtada Al-Sadr made an appearance during the midday prayers at the Kufa mosque in Najaf province. Sadr last spoke in Kufa mosque on April 7. Sadr called on "true believers" to begin to strictly follow Islamic teachings. He also called for a timetable for withdrawal of Coalition Forces (CF), but appeared to modify his long-standing position that CF must completely withdraw from Iraq quickly. He continued his demands that the newly formed Council of Representatives (CoR) take charge of all of the country's affairs, including exclusive responsibility for security. End Summary.

[13](#). (C) The appearance of Muqtada Al-Sadr at Kufa mosque on May 27 for the Friday sermon appeared to be a surprise to all assembled. Sheik Ali Al-Nouamini began the sermon to a crowd of approximately one thousand. Sadr arrived shortly after Nouamini began. He took the floor and went directly to the meat of his message -- "The era of Imam Al Mahdi is near," Sadr told his flock. (Note: Al Mahdi is the 12th Imam of the Shi'a faith. His reappearance, according to Shi'a teaching, will begin the Rapture. End Note.) Shi'a must prepare by devoting their lives to Islamic teachings, according to Sadr.

[14](#). (C) Sadr had a number of demands for Coalition Forces -- The CoR must create a timetable for withdrawal of CF and they must abide by the Iraqi government timeline. However, he noted that CF should stay and defend Baghdad and Sammara. Tempering his calls for the withdrawal of the Coalition, he said that CF "must help lead Iraq to peace." If they could not, however, Sadr asserted that they "should leave the job to the Hawza and clerics." Before completing his sermon, he returned to the fire and brimstone style that characterized the bulk of his message -- He accused CF of supporting sectarianism in order to divide Iraq and said, "President Bush should provide compensation for the families hurt by American troops."

[15](#). (C) Sadr also had words of advice and an admonition for the Iraqi Government -- "The Government should help those who have been displaced," he said (in reference to internally displaced persons fleeing sectarian violence or threats). The Government must also undertake, as part of its duties, talks with all of the governments currently interfering in Iraq. They should, Sadr feels, use their power to convince the countries to "leave Iraq to Iraqis." Finally, he noted that, ultimately, "all Iraqis should take responsibility to unify Iraq."

[16](#). (C) Comment: Sadr's message was disjointed. His call for the withdrawal of CF was not new. However, Sadr's concession

that CF should remain in Baghdad and Samarra was unprecedented. He appears to be attempting to moderate his public stance. For a long time, Sadr has called for nothing less than the total withdrawal of Coalition Forces from Iraq. He may be hoping that his call to allow CF troops to remain in Baghdad and Samarra will seem more thoughtful and less single-minded. It is possible that he hopes, by making small changes to his message, that those who have dismissed his repeated demands in the past will now take note. End comment.

MEURS